



**CGA Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing March 1, 2011
HB 6380 AAC The Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2013
Comments Submitted by Katherine Wilson, School Finance Specialist**

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut welcomes the opportunity today to express our general support for the governor's budget recommendations regarding state aid to local public elementary and secondary education.

We are particularly pleased that the governor has honored his campaign commitment to maintain funding in 2012 and 2013 for the \$1.9 billion Education Cost Sharing grant, the mainstay of state support for local schools. Our hope for the longer term is that the proposed task force to study issues relating to the ECS formula and other means of state funding for education, as outlined in HB 6385 currently before the Education Committee, will lead to a revised aid formula that –

- is based on the latest and best research regarding the factors that influence the cost of educating children of all backgrounds and needs,
- reflects the relative ability of different communities to finance schools from local resources,
- fully funds through grants to towns 50% of the overall statewide cost of local public elementary and secondary education.

We were surprised, however, given the governor's pre-election promise to "hold municipalities harmless," to see 10% cuts to the school transportation and priority school district grants, amounting to a total loss to towns of \$6.9 million in 2012 and \$6.8 million in 2013. We ask the committee to consider instead flat-funding these grants, particularly in light of the fact that the priority district grant serves the most disadvantaged school systems in the state and that, according to the Office of Fiscal Analysis, the proposed continuation of the cap on the transportation grant alone will already cost districts \$60 million in 2012 and \$125.5 million in 2013.

With respect to other grants, we recognize that flat-funding is probably the best the state can do in the midst of the current fiscal crisis, but we are especially concerned about the impact of the long-running cap on the special education Excess Cost Grant, which will deprive districts of an estimated \$30 million in 2012 and \$43.6 million in 2013. This cap can be especially devastating to a small district, where the addition of one or two severely handicapped students can wreak havoc on a local budget.

Thank you again for your consideration of our ideas on this most important legislation.